TV PREVIEWS/MATT

JFK overpowers Walton

Even the Waltons aren't safe from 30th-anniversary JFK mania, as this most redundant of sweeps weeks continues. Good night, Jim-Bob, and let's all change the subject.

First, though, comes ***Who Killed JFK: The Final Chapter?*** **(★★½, CBS, tonight at 9 ET/PT),** CBS News' sixth major look into the subject, which makes you think maybe they (and we) should move on.

But it can't be denied interest in the assassination remains strong. And Dan Rather, who was on the scene in 1963, recites a poll indicating most people think there was a conspiracy of some sort, and 50% believe the CIA was involved. What this says about the truth isn't as clear as what it reveals about our cynical age.

This two-hour *CBS Reports* devotes time to thumbnail histories of the Kennedy presidency and the Lee Harvey Oswald biography before settling down with its main topic: the tragic events of Nov. 22. With computer simulations of the ill-fated motorcade and a painstaking analysis of the Zapruder film, the clinical approach goes beyond the merely graphic.

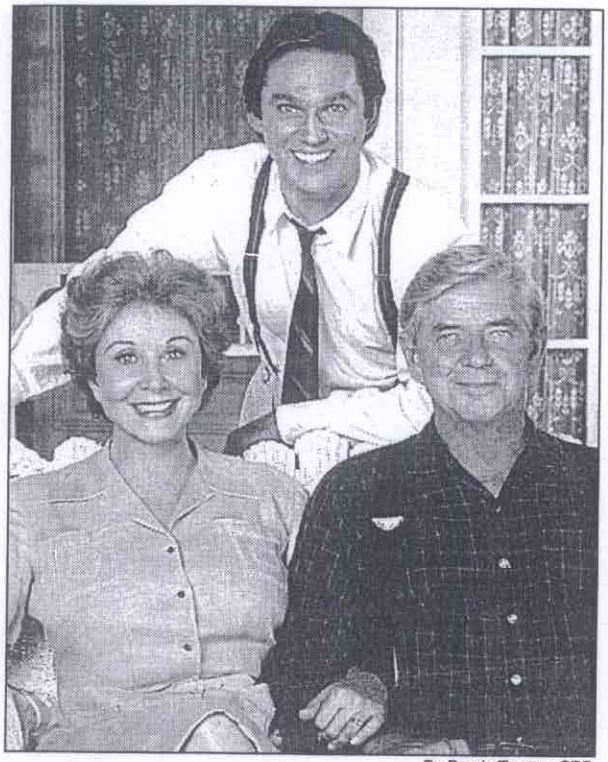
It's too grisly for words.

One segment finds Rather and conspiracy-bashing author Gerald Posner *(Case Closed)* repeatedly freeze-framing the Zapruder film at its bloodiest moment, analyzing trajectory of brain tissue and such. Yuk.

As in *Frontline's* Oswald documentary earlier this week, Posner does a convincing job arguing the single-assassin theory. Yet the more I watch, the less truly enlightened I feel.

One's queasiness intensifies in the four-hour docudrama ***JFK: Reckless Youth*** **(★★, ABC, Sunday and Tuesday, 9 p.m. ET/PT).** More like endless youth, in this uninspired romp through his hanky-panky days as a randy globe-trotting preppy. Think Doogie Kennedy. Young Indiana Jack.

Patrick Dempsey, an actor from the Andrew McCarthy school of forgettable leading men, nails the accent, but that's about it in this exercise of Kennedy as caricature, with sappy *Dynasty* overtones of family power play and steamy interlewds. Best part: his PT 109 adventures, though Cliff Robertson did it better in the movies.



By Randy Tepper, CBS

REUNION: Richard Thomas, top, Michael Learned, left, and Ralph Waite reprise Walton roles for 'Thanksgiving Reunion.'

By Gregory Heisler, ABC

'RECKLESS': Patrick Dempsey plays a young JFK.

The worst part of all this is that the assassination fouls up ***A Walton Thanksgiving Reunion*** **(★★½, CBS, Sunday at 9 p.m. ET/PT),** in which an overabundance of trite domestic crises are meant to reflect a nation in decline, a malaise symbolized by JFK's murder.

John-Boy (Richard Thomas), an unlikely "author-journalist" TV commentator in 1963, is called away from his Walton's Mountain homecoming to TV-comment on the tragedy, leaving his girlfriend to get to know the family — not all of whom aged well. And fewer of whom learned to act.

Still, if we must revisit '70s TV families, better the Waltons than the Bradys. Despite the contrived Kennedy connection, several Hallmark moments hit home, and those pixilated old Baldwin sisters (with their famous "recipe") are still a stitch. As the Waltons experience political awakening amid domestic bliss, this show grows on you like an old robe, threadbare but comfy.

No matter the movie's flaws, you may well think: God be with them till they meet again.

ROUSH 'Thanksgiving'

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